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31 January 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Briefing of Senator John Stennis (D., Miss.)

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1. Accompanied [redacted] OCI, to brief Senator John Stennis (D., Miss.) on the Soviet Bloc, Middle East and Vietnam situations. Also present were Ed Braswell, Staff Director of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and William Spell, Staff Assistant to Senator Stennis. The Senator's questions concerned primarily:

- a. prospects and possible terms of a Middle East settlement, and the Soviet role therein;
- b. sources of support for Arab terrorists;
- c. status of Paris peace talks;
- d. progress of pacification in South Vietnam;
- e. stability and effectiveness of Saigon government;
- f. South Vietnamese military capabilities;
- g. possible results of partial, and eventually complete, withdrawal of U.S. forces;
- h. military capabilities of Vietcong? North Vietnamese forces?
- i. support of Soviets and ChiComs to North Vietnam;
- j. North Vietnamese and Vietcong casualties and defections-- do we have reliable and independent figures, or do we accept the suspiciously optimistic estimates of the U.S. military?

2. The Senator's questions reflected an overriding preoccupation with the military and political situation in Vietnam and the reliability of estimates and statistics thereon, particularly those provided by the military. In general, he apparently feels that an excessively optimistic picture had been created and in our next appearance before his Subcommittee we may be in for intensive questioning along these lines.

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3. The Senator also commented on the Sentinel debate of last session, which he said was already boiling up again. He predicted that we might shortly be "drawn into the middle" of this one.

4. The Senator said he hoped the Agency Subcommittee would be organized "shortly," that Mr. Braswell would serve as the Subcommittee's Chief of Staff, and that quite possibly Senator Russell would wish the Appropriations and Armed Services Subcommittees to meet jointly.

5. Our briefing was interrupted by a phone call from Senator Stephen Young in Ohio during which Senator Steenis commented that "I agree that this is a serious problem" and "I understand your concern" and "we won't do anything until we can get together and talk it over." (I don't know the substance of the above, but rather suspect it may have dealt with the Pueblo problem.)

6. As we parted the Senator said he would like to have a further briefing probably sometime next week to pick up points which time did not permit us to cover today. He indicated he would like frequent briefings in the future, but would generally be flexible as to the timing. He said if he felt he should have the information right away he would tell us so, but that normally when he called for a briefing he would want us to tell him whether or not the timing was convenient for us.

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